

THE CHALLENGE OF RECORDS MANAGEMENT

STAT

CIA Records Administration Officer

Friday, Noon
November 21, 1969

Commencement Luncheon Address:
16th Institute on Records Management
conducted by The American University
and National Archives and Records Service

Banquet Room
Roger Smith Hotel
Washington, D. C.

Thank you Artel, for your generous introduction.

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen:

Dr. Rhoads, Mr. Cole, Mr. Alldredge, Mr. Ricks, Mr. Newgard, Lecturers, Guests, and I was going to say fellow students -- but, you have completed your work in this Sixteenth Institute on Records Management. Therefore, I may address you as fellow Records Managers.

I too completed this Institute. In fact, it was the Sixth Institute that I attended. Just ten years ago. Ours was a two-week session, and we had 43 students. Your class is a reflection of the times. -- You are given only half as much time to get the job done and with half as many people. That is the trend in modern technology.

There is so much I would like to say about Records Management and the modern technology of management that I think I had better use these notes to hold myself in check.

Since we have so many things in common, let me say further that this Institute on Records Management whet my appetite and I have taken a course on Records or Management Technology every semester since then. Each of you is going to be busy with training these next 5 years.

Last night I located our class picture from that Sixth Institute. I was going to share it with you today, but you just would not believe those long skirts the women were wearing. The men, of course, did not change. Some had a little more hair at that time, and a few less pounds, but then there is no need for us to go into that sort of thing today.

More importantly, although I did not know everyone at the Sixth Institute, there were eight people I recognized in that photo who now hold respectable positions among the middle managers of the Federal Government. Is this because of the Institute? I can not provide a cause and effect analysis. After all, who can accurately identify the critical pieces in the mosaic of progress. All the pieces are essential for a complete picture, and some pictures are a joy to behold. I for one found the Institute a bright and important chip in the mosaic of my life. Let us look at your picture, as you juggle this new chip around in your still unsettled and yet manuverable foundation.

Where does Records Management fit in your picture?

You heard Mr. Alldredge, on the first day, explain the concepts of Records Management. You learned of the early importance of records in the life of our Government. The very First Congress specified in the legislation creating each new Agency and Department that each "will make and keep records." Later, when Congress saw the records being neglected or abused, they passed laws to control the indiscriminate destruction of Government records.

You also heard about the Federal Records Act of 1950 which requires every Agency to establish a continuing Records Management Program to insure efficient and economical paperwork operations. National Archives and Records Service is responsible to ensure that every Agency does in fact have an effective Records Program. And they do--and not only in the Federal Government. They have been so successful that many Records Programs in the States, Private Industry, and several Foreign Countries are direct outgrowths of the National Archives effort to provide Total Records Service.

I emphasize TOTAL, even more insistently than they, if that is possible. It is my strong conviction that the life cycle of records are inter-dependent. I am inclined to often quote a principle which I am ready to label "Bosak's Law." I believe that, "In any organization, any improvement or neglect, exercised during the life of a record, will have a direct and proportionate impact on the later life of the record." I feel that if you neglect the controls and management of records creation, your organization will suffer a proportionate problem in records maintenance and disposition later on. An improvement during records creation will improve the records maintenance systems and records disposition functions. In the reverse sequence, the relationships are not so direct. However, improvements in the proper preservation, service, and disposal of records will simplify any subsequent effort to improve the procedures from whence these records come.

My point is that we must always consider the Total Program, and deal with the complete life cycle of the records. This is truly professional Records Management. Does your organization have a complete Records Program? Does it control all phases of paperwork? Each major phase has sub-elements. For example, some experts subdivide their Records Management Programs like this. The Records Creation phase includes the management of Forms, Reports, and Correspondence; the Records Maintenance phase covers records Equipment, Supplies, Procedures, Surveys, Systems (both manual and automated), and Emergency Vital Records; and in the Records Disposition phase they include Inventories, Control Schedules, Storage and Service of Inactive Records, and the Preservation of Archival Records of Continuing Value.

Do you have a full Records Program? Or is your organization only stimulated to action when the office file cabinets are full and the Supervisors order the files screened and purged. They order some files destroyed and some put into storage for uncoordinated, often unspecified, periods without a Program or plan. Unless such whimsical efforts are managed the results can be more costly than the file space gained.

In far too many offices that kind of periodic purge the files approach is the extent of the Records Program. Please remember that "management" and "control" are not negative chains and restraints. They are action and assistance. They are Positive Action according to predetermined standards.

Can you sell an action program? That is where most of your effort will have to go. Selling the Program. Not enough top managers know and understand Records Management and the good it can do for them. You will have to persuade and convince them to let you work as you know the job should be done. That seems strange, but it is true. The need for Records Management dates back to the days of Clay Tablets and Papyrus Rolls, yet, managers still neglect it in these days of magnetic tapes and microforms.

As you know, you should like what ever you do. To be a convincing salesman you must know and like your product. I find the two go together especially well in the Records field. To know the value of records is to like them. To know how to manage, control, or improve paperwork operations is to gain a satisfaction and reward that brings contentment, happiness, and love. My wife says I am well suited to Records Management because I don't hold papers, I fondle them.

When I give training lectures and briefings about Records Programs I find a little cough syrup helpful. But I had to give it up. It seems that when I took a quick nip at the start, people were suspicious of its content. Then as I warmed up to my favorite topic I began to float about the rostrum with enthusiasm and the audience felt certain of the syrup's suspicious nature. Now I have switched to lozengens. None-the-less, even when restrained, I still insist -- Love is the hub of the Universe and Records Management is the grease on the axle. From there on out, all the separate worlds are spinning and their happiness and success depends upon how much of the hub and lubrication they use.

If I was inclined toward astrology, I would say this class has very favorable signs in its orbiting stars and planets. We have a ratio of 12 men to 7 women in this class. I'm sure the ladies find that a lovely proportion in this city which has always had many more girls than boys. But I also notice on the Class List that you have 7 people who work in Management, 6 in Records, and 6 in Archives work. All of you have much to do with records keeping. And good records are an essential factor to the success of your work. You must, for your own good, develop and practice the skills you acquired during this Institute. And you must not be dissuaded from applying them at every opportunity. Which reminds me of a story my philosophy professor told many years ago:

It seems that one evening two clergymen walked in a garden after dinner. They decided a cigarette would be pleasant; and so they went to ask their respective Superiors for permission to have a smoke.

When the younger one sadly returned he found the other smoking contentedly. "My Superior said 'No'," explained the young clergyman.
"Too bad," puffed the older man. "But tell me, what did you ask him?"

"I asked if I may smoke while saying my prayers, and he said no."

"Ah," sighed the older fellow, "I think that was a mistake."
"I asked if I may pray while I was smoking, and he said yes."

And so I turn to Dr. Rhoads and ask politely: "Sir, may I tell these Archivists that they are permitted to practice good Archival principles while doing Records Management work?"

You new managers may feel free to adapt and use that formula to meet your local needs. As any woman will tell you, even love needs a little juggling now and then. But you need not worry about juggling your interest in Records. Today's technologies fairly beg for qualified Records Managers. But I must repeat "qualified,"--with training and experience in the Total Program and modern systems technology.

The modern tools are merely new tools. Like any tool, you must learn how to handle it in order to get its full benefit. In fact any mishandled tool can cause more harm and delay than not having it at all. This is equally true when we develop a system to put our records or procedures into a computer or into some microminiature form. Even with lightening speed processing or 100 to 1 space savings you will find the incomplete system brings problems in a flash or hides your information one hundred times deeper. You have no choice but to learn the new technologies. They are an essential part of Records Management.

And you girls should not worry about your mechanical aptitudes. You must learn what these modern tools and systems can do. What goes in and what comes out. But, you don't have to know all the internal wiring and transistors or the bits and bytes just to use the tools and systems. These new tools should prove no more frightening than were the new tools at the turn of the last century. At that time the President had to persuade Government workers to use typewriters and carbon paper. Can you imagine how baffling those technological developments seemed to the ladies of that day? For the past few years my son, now 12 years old, has been flipping the television dials. He is not intimidated by the complex electronics behind the dial. But, he knows what the machine can do. He knows what to turn in order to reach his objective. He leaves the internal process to the technicians.

Likewise, you too can benefit from modern tools and use them with ease. And the basic requirements are the same with automation tools as with manual systems and equipment. What do you wish your system to provide? First establish your requirements. Then the Systems Analysts and Technicians can help you with the specialized information and equipment you will need to develop the system. And the manufacturers are simplifying these modern tools every year because they want to make them easier for you and other non-technical people to operate without waiting for the technicians.

Unfortunately, a few years ago many offices must have been hypnotized by the blinking lights and expensive chrome on the computers. Many office managers neglected to realize that basic records principles of Creation, Maintenance, and Disposition must prevail whether at nano-second or quill-pen speeds. As a result there exist many automated systems that cause serious records problems for their Agencies and we Records Managers are going to have to correct them before we are buried by high-speed, automated output.

The same is true with any type of microform. Your indexing is even more important in such systems. Yes, the new technologies are increasing the need for qualified Records Officers. The more encompassing your personal knowledge, the greater your worth. In this modern field of information processing and storage and retrieval systems, there is great

exhilaration and pleasure in conceptualizing a new system and helping in its development. It is very satisfying to be needed.

In his class, Mr. Cole speaks of the half-life of an engineer's knowledge. The new technologies are cutting those half-lives in half. Engineers must constantly keep studying. So must doctors and lawyers. It is not surprising then that although the records principles are constant you Records Managers, Archivists, Librarians, and Administrators--all of you must learn what the new tools can do for you and how you can exploit them. A few years ago a Civil Service Commission Survey showed that it found very many middle managers did not know how to exploit the computer systems. The same is true with new microform systems today.

Now the computer can convert magnetic tape information to microfilm. New machines are being built to go in the other direction--to read microfilm and convert its content to magnetic tape machine language. When we can readily go to and from tape to microfilm the information and records systems possibilities will be enormous. And the need for Records Management will grow apace. We haven't even started to fully use that microfilm and computer potential as yet and already the Precision Instrument Corporation of California is offering a massive information storage device. They use a laser beam to burn microscopic holes in metallic film strips; as compared to computers which put magnetic spots on a tape. This laser machine is important because it is an archival storage medium. The computer magnetic tape is excellent in data processing but can barely be counted on to last ten years as a storage medium.

Another thing is speed. This laser device can feed three computers at once. It holds 25,000 cubic feet of files. That is equal to 50 million sheets of paper that would fill 2,500 five-drawer file cabinets. It is not surprising that National Archives and Records Service has been studying that machine for some time, even before the first prototype was completed.

There are many plateaus and a variety of rewards in Records Management. There is a proportionate amount of frustrations and forgotten "thank you's." There is need for specialists and generalists. We have Records Officers in every Government Agency. Many Industries and States also have formal Records Management Programs. The people and programs have many different titles. There is always room at the top and we will continue to have manual systems as well as automated systems.

But, the Records Profession, like the Medical, Legal, and Engineering Professions, requires dedicated, resourceful, and deligent practioneers that have up to date knowledge and experience. Now that you have gotten your feet wet in this Sixteenth Records Management Institute, I have to shout: "Come on in, the water's fine."